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Affirmation

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR:
UNITED METHODISTS FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER CONCERNS
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Our Tradition Of Spiritual Violence Continues

By Gary Shephard

BY:

May 2, 2008: As I sit here in the Corner Bakery Café, life in downtown Fort Worth continues mostly unabated. A food delivery truck is unloading at the Chili's across the street. Trash is being collected. People hurry in, grab a cup of coffee and hurry back to work. It appears to be a day as any other. For most people in the world it is.

Yet the body of the church known as United Methodist lies wounded as evidenced by the chalk body outlines on the north entrance to the convention center.

I know some of the spiritual injury that people suffered here in Fort Worth. I saw the rage and the tears. I saw people so angry

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Reflections from Ground Zero

By Gary Shephard

It's been over for almost three months now. The out-of-towners have gone back to where they came from. The cell phone calls and emails and text messages have dwindled from a flood to a trickle. Life returns to normal, or as normal as it gets around here.

This was by far the most challenging GC of the three I've attended. I live just outside of Fort Worth. Being Local Point Person meant doing things at GC that I'd never done before. And I learned it's a full-time job in itself! Tasks included chasing down everything from plastic forks in rainbow colors to Glue Dots to enough sweets to put a herd of moose into shock. There was always something to

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Reflections...*Continued from page 1)*

be done. Each day started at 5:30 a.m. to get downtown by 7 a.m. to hand out newsletters. Each day ended when I ran out of things that had to be done that day, usually sometime between 10 p.m. and midnight.

We did a newsletter every day this time. GC didn't take Sunday off and neither did we. That Saturday in the middle was always a bit of a breather. It will be next time. I've heard they decided to go back to taking Sunday off. This time we did something we've never done before. I co-edited on-site while Judy WestLee (the other co-editor) worked from Minneapolis.

I chased down the location for the Sweets for Sweets reception. I can't remember now how many emails and phone calls this required. If you were there and enjoyed the refreshments, I take full responsibility. If you didn't like them, I have no idea who was responsible, but I'll volunteer for the board of inquiry.

Including a rainbow colored eraser with one daily newsletter was an interesting decision. Jan Olson, our treasurer, wrote "OUT! GC '08" on 1,500 heart, star, and butterfly-shaped erasers, left 200 erasers blank, then shipped them all to me in two boxes. And of course, one box went missing. Part of the box was returned to Jan's home with a note that the box had been damaged in transit and this was all they could find. By the time we finally got the post office to admit they'd lost them, it was too late to order replacements.

I've done newsletter editing and production for three GCs, but this is the first GC that I've also done newsletter distribution. This is one place where our reconciling coalition can always use more hands. Covering the convention center was a challenge. The Commerce and Houston Street entrances could be

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Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication.

Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Articles for consideration for publication may be submitted to: AffirmationNewsletter_at_yahoogroups.com*

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Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses.



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they needed to scream. But what about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) people who aren't here, who don't have the support network around them? What of the LGBTQ person watching the streaming video and catching the full effect of the vitriolic language? Whom will they turn to? Whom will our church members with LGBTQ family and friends turn to?

Some day we'll all look back on this and wonder why acceptance took so long. Some day The United Methodist Church will apologize for its sin of casting us as other, as different, as unclean and unworthy.

Until that day you'll find us at your annual conferences and you know we'll be in Tampa in 2012 for the next GC. It's only four years away. I already have it on my calendar. As I said in my article *We're Still Here* in the April 23 newsletter, you can't get rid of us. Even if we all left, what are you going to do about your LGBTQ children being born to United Methodist families, coming up through your confirmation classes and UMYF?

We'll keep working on this until there's truth behind "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors."



Looking Back From a Different Prospective

By Jim Palmquist
Former Affirmation Council Co-Coordinator

I recently completed eight years on the Affirmation National Council. For the last four years, I served as Co-Coordinator. This was my third GC.

The motto of The United Methodist Church is "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." In spite of this and though General Conferencing is supposed to be about Holy Conferencing, it seemed much more like fighting without swords.

Our church is broken over acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people. In one of several issues that came before the GC, when delegates tried to live out the motto, parliamentary procedure was ignored to give additional voice to ultra conservative positions. Progressive voices were muffled when a delegate called for a vote and the proposal was decided. Holy Conferencing should be about hearing what the silenced have to say, but the silenced were not heard. On this vote (Para. 161.G) the progressives got 45% of the vote, but resistant forces won with 55%. Another progressive issue was voted down 50.7% to 49.3%. Times are changing, but it will be a future General Conference when progressives carry the day. For our denomination to grow its membership or even maintain the status quo, it must follow Christ's welcome to all.

Yet the Holy Spirit works even when many fight it. Well over 350 progressive people, primarily in support of full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people in the church, were in Fort Worth in force. The capstone event was the witness on May 1. A couple of hundred protesters entered the GC convention floor and were joined by hundreds of the thousand elected delegates. The 2008 General Conference Proclamation was read. A copy of the Proclamation is available at <http://www.generalconference2008.org/2008/05/the-2008-genera.html>. The subsequent statements in the witness are at <http://www.generalconference2008.org/2008/05/witness-on-the.html>. The entire event can be seen at <http://www.generalconference2008.org/>. It was a stunning witness. Bishop Melvin Talbert spoke, equating the "sin" of our church in 1939 when all black Methodist congregations were moved into a separate jurisdiction to the GC 2008 decision about continuing to "leave them (our LGBTQ sisters and brothers) out rather than invite them in to work out our relationships in the name of Christ."

Another success for progressives included the election of all five of their slate of nominees to the Judicial Council. Recent Judicial Council decisions have been so ultra conservative that even conservatives distanced themselves from some of those decisions.

Additional evidence of the Holy Spirit's work is the wide majority of US delegates that have aligned with welcoming LGBTQ people. However, with more than a quarter of the delegates coming from outside the US and many of them coming from evangelical missionary roots, progressive forces get very few of their votes at GC.

So the progressive witness was grand, the Holy Spirit empowers its work and the UMC will someday be made whole in Christ's vision.

First Affirmation *OUT!* Awards Given at GC

By Gary Shephard

At this General Conference, Affirmation honored one lay volunteer and one professional person for their work in furthering our cause in The United Methodist Church.

The event was held in the meeting room at the Intermodal Transportation Center, also known as the "Clock tower building" Saturday, April 26. (When everybody is in a strange town, official names for buildings quickly give way to identifying characteristics.) The awards were intended to celebrate those in our community that help advance our cause and to be a chance for us to get together for a bit of fun.

Randy Miller received the lay award. Randy is currently Chair of the Board of RMN. He's been an Affirmation member for many years, and has served on the national council and has been co-spokesperson.

Sue Laurie received the professional award. Sue is the Outreach Coordinator for RMN. She is constantly "out in the field" advising congregations on how to take the next step in becoming more publicly welcoming to all of God's children. She spent much of 2007 and the first part of 2008 working with congregations seeking to make change here at GC.

Other lay nominees include: **Ellie Charlton**, previously active in Affirmation, often "behind the scenes" while her partner Jeanne Barnett (deceased) was in the spotlight; **Mary Gaddis** (deceased,) a previous Affirmation co-spokesperson equally adept at getting her message across with words or without; **Will Green**; **Joey Heath**, denied transfer of his membership; **Jorge Lockward**, a talented musician, often seen at RMN Convos, and a lay delegate to GC 2008; **Mark Miller**, director of music of the Drew Theological School, a music leader at GC 2008, with musical credits too lengthy to list here; **Kathryn Mitchem**, Affirmation founding member, and long time national council member, past National Affirmation Council Coordinator; **Amory Peck**, a past Affirmation National Council member and co-spokesperson, active in her annual conference; **Beth Richardson**; **Bobbi Ruddock**, involved with *Coming Out Young and Faithful* (UCC publication,) GLSEN, and RMN; **Gary Shephard**, previously on the Affirmation National Council and co-convenor for four years, co-editor of Affirmation Daily Newsletters at GC 2000, GC 2004 and GC 2008; **Jennifer Soule**; and **Jonathan Vigne**, wanted to follow his father's footsteps as a UM minister, teaches Sunday School, and organized an LGBTQ choir in his church.

Other professional nominees include: **Mark Bowman**, executive director of the RCP program (later to become RMN), active in The United Methodist Church, organized two Witness Our Welcome convos, previously active with Affirmation; **Karen Damman**; **Mary Rose Denman**; **Jeanne Knepper**, a past Affirmation Co-spokesperson; **Drew Phoenix**, female to male transgender ordained UM Clergy, Baltimore Washington AC, elder since 1989, serving a reconciling congregation; **Troy Plummer**, current executive director of RMN, previously on the pastoral staff at Bering Memorial in Houston; **Jean Audrey Powers**, a retired UM elder, active at various times with Affirmation, RMN and MFSA; **Beth Stroud**, defrocked UM elder serving on the pastoral staff at First UMC Germantown (Philadelphia); and **Kathleen Weber**, out UM elder serving as associate pastor, supported by a congregation which is not at this time a Reconciling Congregation.

Meeting Our Grandkids

By Jan Olson

Affirmation Treasurer & Long-Time Activist

I had the great pleasure of meeting our “grandkids” at General Conference 2008. Who, you may ask, are our grandkids? Let me introduce you to them, but a little history first.

I became involved with Affirmation 23 years ago. I put myself in a category that I affectionately call the “old-timers”. I feel very much a part of the birthing/raising of the “Reconciling Congregations Program” (RCP) which later came to be known as the “Reconciling Ministries Network” (RMN). RMN birthed MoSAIC (Methodist Students for an All-Inclusive Church). When I thought of the this familial relationship between Affirmation and MoSAIC I felt a bond even before I had officially met any of them. When I took the time to sit down with members of MoSAIC I told them I thought of them as my grandkids (and explained in case anyone didn’t know of the relationship between the organizations). My heart melted when the response from some of them (mostly “awwws”) made me realize they, too, like the concept.

Here’s some of what I learned from the grandkids:

- they want to hear our stories as well as telling us their stories
- they have embraced “Queer” in describing themselves and this old-time lesbian needs to get over whatever negative connotation still floats around in her head about that word
- they don’t want to just hear “you are our future” but want very much to be our present as well (and they truly and exceptionally showed that at GC ’08)
- that at least one of them already has a mormor (Swedish for grandma) but is willing to have another
- that they struggle with finances just like many of us “old-timers” did when we first got involved with Affirmation
- that there’s no need for a telephone when you can text-message

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So Many Missed Opportunities

By Diane DeLap
Affirmation Spokesperson

By a vote of 501 to 417 the UMC General Conference voted to accept a new version of Paragraph 161.G (See elsewhere in this newsletter). However, instead of accepting the majority report from the Church and Society 2 Legislative Committee that would have removed the "incompatibility" language, the minority report was accepted. The majority report stated in part that *"We know that all are God's children and of sacred worth; yet we have been, and remain, divided regarding homosexual expressions of human sexuality. Faithful, thoughtful people who have grappled with this issue deeply disagree with one another; yet all seek a faithful witness. We continue to reason and pray together with faith and hope that the Holy Spirit will soon bring reconciliation to our community of faith."* This version offered the hope of breaking the logjam of painful conflict that the UMC has endured for the past thirty years.

The new text of Paragraph 161.G can be found at <http://calms.umc.org/2008/Menu.aspx?type=Petition&mode=Single&Number=80449>

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-that they are willing to work and struggle and act-up to make sure the UMC notices (sound familiar anyone?)

-that they keep the hours that we grandparents used to keep when we were their age

-that they are people you should meet – their enthusiasm is contagious

It is my hope that I can continue to get to know the grandkids. And just like a biological grandparent I am committed to helping them out wherever possible. I hope you, especially my fellow "old-timers," will be willing to join me.

The members of MoSAIC want to be able to gather as a group on a regular basis, but finances become a large roadblock for them. They would especially like to be a part of the RMN convocation in Colorado over Labor Day week-end 2009 and asked if there could be financial assistance from Affirmation supporters. How about it? Anyone willing to help the grandkids? Can you afford to give some scholarship money to help finance travel or registration fees? Do you have any extra frequent flyer miles that could be given to a MoSAIC member?

If, when the time comes, you can be counted on to help out, please send a note to Affirmation's P.O. Box or email address letting me know you can be contacted at that time. I will appreciate your help. I know the grandkids will appreciate it and you may even hear some "awwws" that will warm your heart.

Drops of Water Will Wear Away Stone

By Tim Tennant-Jayne
Affirmation Council Member

It was raining that morning. I'd had about four hours of sleep after traveling from Minneapolis to Fort Worth. All of this, so I could hand out copies of Affirmation's daily newsletter and rainbow-striped bandanas to bleary-eyed General Conference delegates. **And the common expectation was that once again these delegates would vote for hatred.** I had to wonder, why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we keep coming back to General Conference every four years for the abuse we've experienced at Fort Worth, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Denver and on back?

Well, for one thing, working for social justice is a part of United Methodism. Affirmation is being historically consistent with the river of our denominational heritage. John Wesley, our founder, was very clear that being a Methodist was more than just attending church services. He felt that members of this movement should indeed worship together and study the Scriptures. Yet he also insisted that they live out their beliefs by seeking to create a just society.

John was even willing to take risks for what was right. At one time, he insisted on visiting a prisoner, "young Blair", who was accused of "sodomitical practices." Several individuals urged John to cease spending time with Blair because of the damage they felt this would cause the Methodist movement. Wesley continued ministering to Blair and Methodism continued growing.

We also join the ocean of our scriptural and Christian heritage. Christ reminded the disciples "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40 NRSV). When we are welcoming other people, we are welcoming Christ among us. Scholars such as Daniel Helminiak (*What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*), John Boswell (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*), and others have demonstrated that the Bible does not condemn queer folk. We have been a part of the Christian Church since the Resurrection.

Individually, through the waters of baptism, we pledge to "resist evil in all its' guises." By challenging United Methodist doctrine, we continue to resist the evils of hatred experienced in homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. The fear of persons who are different from the majority, those who are "the others."

I had tears when they announced the vote results at General Conference. I still strive to acknowledge that we need to love others even when they disagree with us. In these times, we need to remember that our baptismal promise is to resist the evil. We may not get everyone to recognize that we are all God's beloved children. But we resist the hatred for ourselves. And we trust that through continuing this struggle, more and more people will know God's all-encompassing love.

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GC Condemns Violence & Discrimination

By Victoria Rebeck & Edited by Gary Shephard

Violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people was firmly condemned Wednesday, April 30. The GC delegates passed a resolution saying that *"actions rooted in homophobia and heterosexism, including violence, threats, ridicule, humiliation, discrimination, isolations and rejection, is damaging to persons of all sexual orientations and identities."*

The resolution also calls The United Methodist Church to strengthen its advocacy of the eradication of sexism by opposing all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice or sexual orientation. Further, it directs the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, based in Washington, D.C., to provide resources and materials *"aimed at educating members of the local churches about the reality, issues, and effects of homophobia and heterosexism and the need for Christian witness against these facts of marginalization."*

The resolution did not make a statement *about* homosexuality. Its purpose was to condemn violence and discrimination against people who do not "appear to fit within the particular category defined as appropriate for their gender." To read the complete text, visit <http://gc2008.umc.org> and under "Track legislation" enter petition 80845.

Legislative Miscellaneous...

An attempt to change Paragraph 214 in Section V Church membership to prevent an elder from preventing someone the elder feels unworthy of church membership from joining failed to pass. This means that Judicial Council ruling 1032 is still in effect and anyone can be denied membership if the pastor determines the person is not ready for membership for any reason.

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(Drops of Water...Continued from page 8)

For many years, the song, *The Rock Will Wear Away* by Holly Near and Meg Christian, has practically been Affirmation's anthem. The chorus goes:

*"Can we be like drops of water falling on the stone
splashing, breaking, dispersing in air
weaker than the stone by far but be aware that
as time goes by the rock will wear away
and the water comes again."*

In baptism, we become these drops of water. Affirmation has been falling on The United Methodist Church for nearly 40 years. We will continue to do so. The rock is wearing away.

Where Do We Go From Here?

By Gary Shephard

This GC was a turning point for our church. No, we didn't get everything we wanted. We did get a few things, and these few things are signs of hope.

We have a less conservative Judicial Council. Now hopefully we'll see rulings that reflect the Holy Spirit, rather than making select portions of the Social Principles chargeable offenses, or narrowly defining the Discipline in ways it was never intended to be interpreted.

Article 4 (Paragraph 4) of the constitution was changed to read "all persons" willing to recite the appropriate vows shall be accepted into membership in any local church in the connection. This was adopted by a 2/3 vote. It now goes to the annual conferences for ratification. I'm assuming it'll be voted on in 2009. I didn't see it at our annual conference this year.

No legislation putting burdens on transgender persons passed. We may not be getting the old burdens out of the Discipline, but at least we're not adding new ones.

Paragraph 161.A was modified to change "fathers and mothers" to "loving parents" and "men and women" to "two parents." As a "stepfather" to my partner's son, I consider this important. (My stepson and I usually refer to me as the evil step queen, ESQ for short, but that's a story for another day.)

And the joyous, adventuresome spirit that was evident in Fort Worth – this was the most uplifting of the three GCs I've been to.

The **Out Awards** – as local point I was extremely busy and I don't know that I would have made it except that I was nominated for the lay award. It was uplifting to hear that so many people work so many hours in both volunteer and paid capacities to make our movement possible. For all of the nominees there are untold more all working to move us forward.

The "**Silence = Death**" banner that mysteriously appeared on the Park Central Hotel railing facing the convention center one morning.

Granted, it wasn't there long, and I have no idea who put it there, and dang wouldn't you know it was the one morning I didn't throw my camera into the car at 6 a.m. as I was heading out of the house to go hand out newsletters. It was a vital reminder that when we lose hope and become silent we've died.



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(Where From Here...Continued from page 10)



May 1—As delegates came into the morning session they had to step over and around the Die In.

The Facing the Delegates as they came back to plenary after the Paragraph 161.G vote, the Die-in the next morning, and the Protest on the Floor were all bold witnesses.

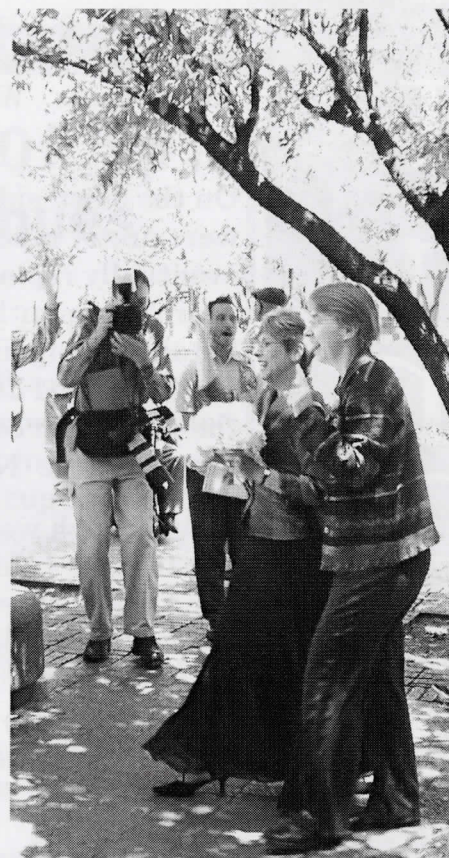
The Holy Union of

Julie Bruno and Sue Laurie was quite the celebration on the last day of GC. Normally we're all comatose after all the newsletter production and newsletter distribution and legislation tracking and event planning and execution. This was the event of GC 2008.

And, of course, the Susan G. Komen Race For The Cure on Saturday, April 26. We arrived to hand out newsletters that morning and wondered what all those pink balloons were three blocks north of the convention center on Main Street.



May 1—During the protest on the floor, people laid black cloth on the communion table at the center of the conference floor.



May 2—Julie Bruno and Sue Laurie arrive at General Worth Square for the ceremony.

It was our reminder to breathe, to center, that as much as we sometimes tend to get wrapped up in changing this United Methodist Church thingy, that life around us continues, that the church isn't the only thing. Sometimes, however briefly, we need to look elsewhere.

Me? Well, I have to get through the peach harvest. Our peach trees came in right on time this year. We'll be doing "drive by peachings" to distribute our bounty. Then there's the Affirmation Newsletter to get out, and then, by golly, there's GC 2012 to get ready for. I'd better get cracking! It's less than four years away.

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(Reflections...*Continued from page 2)*

covered by one person from each of the three coalition organizations. The Ninth Street entrance – now there was a challenge. It has 17 sets of double doors. We needed at least 6 people per organization for that entrance.

On the down side, the arguments on the floor over paragraph 161.G were pretty much as one would expect. The minority report (which eventually replaced the majority report and eventually passed) was micro wordsmithed for hours. The “S” word (we are, apparently, of Satan) was again used by an African delegate. The petition that would have reversed JC 1032 failed by a handful of votes. On the other hand the resolution condemning violence against us passed by a surprisingly large margin. None of the transgender legislation (all bad) passed.

Even though we didn't get everything we wanted this time, we did get a few things. I think there's a good chance we'll get this Discipline thingy fixed one of these GCs. I'm already putting together ideas for 2012. When did the ideas start coming together? At the reconciling coalition communion after GC closed May 2nd. I'm here for the duration. We'll get this church into the 20th century soon. And then we can start working on getting it into the 21st.

(Legislative Misc. ...Continued *from page 9)*

An irregularity in the voting on this measure has come to light. The item was not brought up for reconsideration.

Items barring transgender clergy were voted down.

Corporate Meeting

The Affirmation Corporate meeting will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 12.

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For the exact location call
978-884-7401 on Oct. 12.



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